

# NNewsline



*Delivering Technology Access to  
America's Communities*

## TechBridge Project Spurs Resident Participation

**T**he leaders at the Sutton Place Neighborhood Networks Center in Indianapolis, Indiana, know how to encourage resident participation. The successful launching of the center's TechBridge program—which offers Microsoft Office User Specialist (MOUS) certification, general equivalency diploma (GED) classes, and employment skills and job-readiness training—is testimony to this.

Center Coordinator Donna Williams and Sutton Place Apartments Community Service Coordinator Esther Whitley lead a dynamic team that is helping to meet residents' needs. The strategies they employ to identify these needs are simple and informal, yet effective. One strategy is to advertise upcoming programs and solicit feedback for program ideas in the Sutton Place Apartments monthly newsletter. In addition, the apartment complex has an opportunity center where residents meet daily to collect free food items and participate in social and recreational activities. As residents visit this center, Williams and her staff employ another strategy: They interview the residents about their employment and educational needs. It was in this setting that residents expressed an overwhelming desire for computer, employment, and occupational-skills training.

Armed with this information, Williams and staff were then faced with the challenge of offering programs to address these needs. "We wanted to design a program where we could offer all of these services at one time," says Williams. Together, the team tackled issues of funding and participation barriers that might arise from such a venture. They received grant funds from the Indianapolis

## CONTENTS

TechBridge Project  
Spurs Resident  
Participation .....1

Local Partnership  
Launches GED  
Pilot Program .....4

Residents Learn  
Job-Applicable  
Computer Skills .....7

HUD Responds to  
Call for More  
Center Support .....9

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## TechBridge Testimonials

A year ago **Tina Wilson** was an unemployed single mother who was unsure about what she wanted to do with her life. One day she received a flyer from the Sutton Place Neighborhood Networks Center advertising computer training and certification. "I had no knowledge of computers but knew that I needed to," says Wilson.

She enrolled in the TechBridge project in December 2002. In February 2003, less than 3 months after beginning the program, she earned her GED. She also learned how to build a computer and use the Windows 98 operating system, and she trained on Office 2000 software, particularly Microsoft Word and Excel.

Wilson praises the center for eliminating barriers that would have impeded her success. "I got to keep the computer I built," she adds. "That's one financial debt I didn't have to incur. I achieved many personal, self-improvement goals that will enhance my resume and will open opportunities for better jobs," she says. With the help of the program's employment training instructor, Wilson is now employed as a certified nurse assistant with Castleton Healthcare, where she also performs data entry and admitting functions.

**Marjorie Clements** had been unemployed for more than 6 months when she enrolled in the TechBridge project. She was attracted by the project's MOUS certification component. "Unlike most of my classmates, I was very familiar with computers. I had been building computers since I was 16.

*Continued on page 3*

Private Industry Council (IPIC) and held a 2-week resident orientation where barriers, including childcare and transportation, were identified and addressed.

"Recruitment for the project began in October 2002 and ended November 2002. Initial interest was overwhelming," says Williams. Unfortunately not all interested residents could be accommodated. "There were certain IPIC grant requirements that needed to be met," she explains. "Although all of the residents met the income requirement, some did not meet the 19 to 21 age requirement." In December 2002, the project officially began.

## Gaining Hands-On Experience

"Residents built their own computers," says Williams. "They learned about the various computer parts and their functions and about troubleshooting. Once they built their computers, they then installed software tutorials in Word, Excel, and Windows for training for MOUS." In addition, they used the Mavis-Beacon self-paced typing tutorial for keyboarding. "Residents worked on their skills until they were ready to take the MOUS test, which was paid with grant funds," explains Williams. As they prepared for the test, residents also enrolled in a 2-week preemployment job-readiness training, that included soft skills, life skills, financial literacy, job-skills identification, employer expectations, job satisfaction factors, interview preparation and techniques, and resume writing.

## Partnerships Eliminate Barriers

The center formed partnerships with the following organizations to successfully launch the TechBridge project:

- ◆ **Henkels and McCoy, Inc.**, a Pennsylvania engineering, network development, and construction firm, which offers the MOUS training, a nationally recognized certification. The company provided the curriculum and the TechBridge skills trainer and also served as grant manager.
- ◆ **The Indiana Athletic Teen Basketball Association (IATBA)**, which provided recruitment, eligibility certification, case management, job readiness, job placement, and job retention services; supportive services; and fiscal services.
- ◆ **Loving Unity Daycare**, which provided a childcare program for participants, eliminating any childcare barriers.
- ◆ **T & Associates**, a counseling firm, and **WKW & Associates**, an employment and training organization that provided training

*Continued from page 2*

The project was a way of getting my certification. However, [even] if I hadn't known anything about computers, it would have been very helpful. The instructor, Darlene, is a wonderful teacher." Not only did Clements get her certification, but she scored much higher than was required to pass. "MOUS certification does look pretty nice on a resume. And it helped me brush up on my Microsoft Office skills. I use these skills all the time at work and at home," she says.

**Tunisha Perkins** was recovering from a back injury when she saw an ad for the Sutton Place Neighborhood Networks Center, TechBridge project.

"There was no application fee, just a number to call if you were interested. I was interested, so I called," says Perkins. She enrolled in and completed the project and is pleased with the training she received. "I learned how to build a computer, use a lot of software, interview effectively, and I improved my typing skills." Perkins is presently an administrative assistant for the Indianapolis Housing Authority and believes her training played a factor in her employment. "Because of my skill enhancement, I had more choices while I was job hunting. I've realized an increase in salary. Thanks to TechBridge, I have computer skills now, and I use them to my advantage." Thanks to her new job, Tunisha became a homeowner in October.

in conflict management, job-readiness and job retention skills, and life skills.

- ♦ **Sutton Place Opportunity Center and Sutton Place Apartments**, which provided staffing, program recruitment services, and space, thereby eliminating transportation barriers.

## **Success by the Numbers**

"Most residents enrolled in the program were unemployed, and others were making minimum wage at best," says Williams. As a result of their participation in the program, many residents have found employment. Wages and family income have increased. Residents have gained essential life skills and self-esteem.

According to Williams, the computer certification program enrolled 24 students in November 2002. Twenty-two completed the course, with three enrolling in higher education institutions. Six received their MOUS certification and 19 obtained employment with wages ranging from \$9.75 to \$11.50 per hour.

The GED program had 54 enrollees. So far eight have earned their GED and more than half are ready for the test. Williams estimates that the program's job success rate—the percentage of those who gain and retain employment after participating in the training and receiving direct employability assistance services—to be above 75 percent.

Sutton Place will be adding four new occupational-skills training programs in November 2003: Pharmacy Tech Training, Medical Billing, Medical Coding, and Medical Transcriptionist Training. All training programs will include basic computer and customer service training. ♦

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## Local Partnership Launches GED Pilot Program

**C**laude Killingsworth saw a need in his community. Daily, as the center director for the New Horizon Neighborhood Networks Center at the Hickory Heights Apartments, he encountered individuals without high school credentials and in need of adult basic education. Driven by a desire to help these residents, he sought a way to address this need. “They need to get their GED [general equivalency diploma] to become better citizens, prepare for the job market, and gain employment,” says Killingsworth. Because the New Horizon Center is a recipient of HUD’s onsite technical assistance, Killingsworth received help to address this need. Technical assistance specialists researched educational resources in Abbeville County, where the center is located, and identified Abbeville Adult Education—a facility in Abbeville, South Carolina, that offers GED and adult education classes—as a possible resource for the center.

“We were so happy to be approached,” says Deborah Ayers, an Abbeville Adult Education representative. “We are very Abbeville County-minded and will do anything to empower citizens to reach their goals,” she adds. The facility’s mission is to encourage and provide lifelong learning opportunities to adults through academic and occupational courses. “We knew that there was a need in Hickory Heights and Oakland Apartments because residents have visited us to inquire about our programs. Some even registered for our programs but never showed up,” says Ayers. After a series of meetings between parties, a memorandum of understanding was signed and a partnership was created—Abbeville Adult Education would provide GED classes to residents of Hickory Heights and Oakland Apartments.

### Program Structure and Development

Killingsworth and center staff would inform residents of the program, and Abbeville Adult Education would select and pay an instructor. “We had to establish how to set up the class as well as where and when to offer it,” says Ayers. Although Abbeville Adult Education had its own facility, the New Horizon Neighborhood Networks Center was chosen as the class venue to eliminate any transportation barrier. After assessing the needs of the community of predominantly single, unemployed mothers, classes were scheduled for Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to noon. “We chose that block of time to eliminate any childcare issues for the



*GED class participants at the New Horizon Neighborhood Networks Center.*



parents. Their children are in daycare or at school during these hours,” says Killingsworth.

In addition, Abbeville Adult Education stipulated that the center had to maintain a 10-person minimum attendance to justify hiring a certified instructor. It also eliminated its open enrollment policy—assigning a specific start and end date for the classes—and proposed a \$20 registration fee. “We felt that the fee would be an incentive,” says Ayers. “It would give the participants a sense of ownership, and they would want to get their money’s worth.”

Before the start of the class, which ran from September 22 to October 22, there was a period of orientation and registration during which interested residents were assessed to measure their academic skills. Then the curriculum was structured based on their strengths and weaknesses. Course work included reading, math, science, social studies, and history. “If a majority of residents were strong in fractions, that would not be a major focus of the mathematics component,” says Ayers. “But if a majority were weak in algebra or geometry, then these subjects were emphasized. Residents did a lot of math and reading,” she says.

Having the right instructor was a key component to the success of the program. “Residents need someone who understands their economic, social, and academic situations, including their family background,” says Killingsworth, who is pleased with Abbeville Adult Education’s choice of Willie-Belle Wright, a retired school-teacher. “She actually taught some of the GED class participants when they were in grade school,” he adds. “They remember her, and they love and trust her.”

Wright, who taught for 30 years in Abbeville County School District 60 and who lives just a mile and a half from the center, was thrilled to be chosen to teach the class. “I wanted to do something to keep my mind sharp,” she says with a laugh. “I develop my own lesson plan, and I have a wonderful relationship with the students.” However, she admits that attendance is the most challenging aspect of her teaching experience whereas the most rewarding aspect is seeing her students learn. “They want to learn.... They are eager students who are really trying to better themselves,” she says.

“Willie-Belle made the difference in this program,” says Ayers. “She is dynamic and made students want to attend.”



*Abbeville Adult Education instructor,  
Willie-Belle Wright.*

## Residents Praise GED Program

**Janet Brownlee** enrolled in the class to get her GED and be a positive example for her three children. "I want to get a better paying job to save [money] and buy a house so that my children can have a nice, safe place to live and play. I would recommend this class to other residents. Ms. Wright is very special.... She takes time to explain subjects and is patient, understanding, and eager to teach."

**Venesia Jackson** is a single mother with one child. "I didn't finish high school, so I enrolled in the class to finish my education and earn my GED. I was laid off from a textile plant recently, and I hope that having a GED will help me get a better paying job. It is great that the center offers this program. I have a great relationship with Ms. Wright, and I feel as if I can ask her anything."

**Cornelius Killingsworth** is a construction worker who signed up for the class to better himself. "I want a better paying job, and I want to pursue studies in architecture and design. Math was challenging, but everything else was okay. Our instructor is a great teacher.... She's nice, [she's] patient, and [she] explains things in a way you can understand. I would recommend this course to other residents."

## Partners Look Ahead

Killingsworth is pleased with his center's GED pilot program. "As long as we can maintain the 10-person minimum attendance requirement, this partnership will certainly continue," he says.

Ayers is also enthusiastic about the partnership and looks forward to offering the center future programs. "This partnership is a win-win situation for students and for us. Our thrust is to educate adults in all of Abbeville County, and we welcome partnerships such as the one with Hickory Heights to help us reach our goal."

Ayers believes that when residents, such as those enrolled in a GED class, receive skills enhancement, it has an impact on those around them. "It never impacts just the individual," she says. "If a parent achieves, the child benefits because [the parent] can help [the child] with...homework. It's great when parents obtain high school credentials so that their children will see the benefit," she explains. Ayers believes that the participants are the best advertisement for such programs. "If they succeed, it's great promotion for us. Their word of mouth is the best public relations we can get," she says. ♦

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## Residents Learn Job-Applicable Computer Skills at Elva McZeal Computer Learning Center

**G**raduation is always a momentous occasion. Students gladly celebrate this day as their reward for years of hard work. However, graduation day is even more important for participants of the computer training program at Brooklyn's Elva McZeal Computer Learning Center (CLC). These graduates are celebrating the beginning of a journey filled with new opportunities. Whether working toward earning their general equivalency diploma (GED) or gaining computer skills that have long eluded them, graduates of the center's computer training program now possess the knowledge they need to advance in today's computer-reliant workforce.

The Elva McZeal CLC began providing computer training courses in October 1996. Since then, according to Center Director Dorothy Jones, more than 100 participants have successfully completed the program. The course runs for 16 weeks, with classes offered in the morning, afternoon, and evening to provide participants with a greater degree of schedule flexibility. The center also provides parents who wish to attend classes with free onsite childcare.

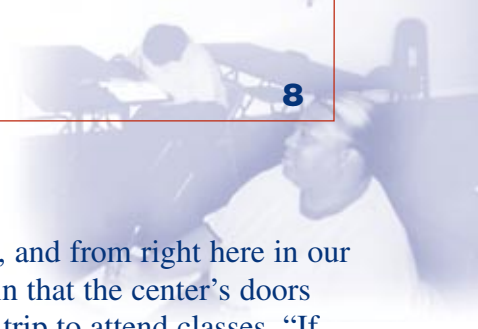
The CLC's instructors teach people typing fundamentals and how to use the Microsoft suite of programs—Access, Excel, PowerPoint, and Word—that they would most often encounter in the workforce. First, however, students receive basic training in how to operate and troubleshoot potential problems with computers. Jones explained that this is because she and her staff believe that a well-rounded understanding of how a computer works is fundamental before participants can proceed with learning about various software packages.

Each class, composed of approximately 10 students, reflects the diversity of its surrounding community. Students range in age and have different reasons for attending the CLC's classes. Some use the information they learn at Elva McZeal to work toward earning their GEDs. Others, who already have college degrees, return to the classroom to gain computer knowledge not available during their prior schooling.

Though the center receives no funding through outside partnerships, Jones serves on several community affairs boards that refer students to the center. For example, several students referred to the course by the East New York Urban Youth Corps have completed the program. Jones notes that participants come from many areas surrounding the center's Bronx location. "We've had people come

**If they make the effort to come to class, we make sure they make it to graduation.**

*—Dorothy Jones, director*



to us from Nassau County, Long Island, and from right here in our own neighborhood.” Jones makes certain that the center’s doors are open to anyone willing to make the trip to attend classes. “If they make the effort to come to class, we make sure they make it to graduation.”

The center conducts official ceremonies for each graduating class, providing everyone with an opportunity to invite family and friends to mark the completion of their course work. Jones and her staff present each graduate with a certificate of completion. The center provides those who did not successfully pass the course on their first attempt with a certificate of attendance and encourages them to enroll for the next program. Jones stresses that everyone is rewarded for his or her efforts and that the center strives to ensure that everyone completes his or her training successfully.

Each graduation, Jones invites community leaders, such as state and local politicians and community agency representatives, to speak to graduates and occasionally offer them jobs. Jones encourages participants to bring their resumes to their graduation “because you just never know what will be waiting for you.” Many graduates have received jobs with community agencies or even with the CLC.

Lloyd Johnson, who completed the center’s program in 2001, is such a graduate. As an employee of United Parcel Service for 15 years, Johnson often needed to seek help from his coworkers and employees in doing what he now recognizes as simple tasks, such as formatting a disk or creating an Excel spreadsheet. While attending a work-related meeting at Elva McZeal, he happened to notice the adjacent computer classroom. When he learned of the center’s training program, Johnson said, “I immediately asked where I could sign up.”

Johnson now volunteers at the center, assisting the program’s instructors and providing extra guidance to those who are struggling with their studies. His praise for the program is extensive. “Before I took this class, I knew how to turn the computer on and off. Beyond that, I was lost. If it weren’t for [this program], I would still be computer illiterate.” Johnson stated that several of his classmates had gone on to secure jobs with the city, including a classmate who now works for the New York Housing Authority.

When asked what she thinks the center’s training program provides the community, Jones agreed that it’s helping residents gain the skills they need to obtain job security. However, Jones feels that another benefit of the program is the connection that participants form with each other. “People coming to us for training typically don’t know anyone else in their class. When they graduate,

**Before I took this class, I knew how to turn the computer on and off. Beyond that, I was lost. If it weren’t for [this program], I would still be computer illiterate.**

*—Lloyd Johnson,  
program graduate*



they leave as part of a family, which helps make our community that much stronger.” ♦

For more information on the Elva McZeal Computer Learning Center, contact:

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## **HUD Responds to Call for More Center Support**

*By Delores A. Pruden*

*Director of HUD's Neighborhood Networks,  
an initiative of the Office of Multifamily  
Housing Programs*



**Y**ou asked for more technical assistance, tools, and resources, and we plan to deliver. That is HUD's important new message to Neighborhood Networks centers nationwide.

A 2003 survey of Neighborhood Networks centers located in HUD's assisted and insured Multifamily Housing programs helped us identify specific center needs, and now we are responding to the call. From an enhanced Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) to the *2003 Neighborhood Networks Directory*, to Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs) and electronic newsletters, HUD is delivering a wide range of new and expanded center support—now and in the future.

The survey findings provide valuable information about the characteristics of Neighborhood Networks centers and identify trends and patterns that will guide the future of the initiative. The survey findings, which will be mailed in a report to all HUD Multifamily Neighborhood Networks centers, paint a detailed picture of the 330 centers that responded. Today, more than 1,200 Neighborhood Networks centers are operating in privately owned housing developments that are assisted and insured by HUD.

Approved by the Office of Management and Budget, the voluntary telephone survey confirmed important information about Neighborhood Networks centers. For example, three types of programs

**Today, more than 1,200 Neighborhood Networks centers are operating in privately owned housing developments that are assisted and insured by HUD.**

*—Delores A. Pruden,  
Neighborhood Networks director*

and services appear most valued by center users: computer skills, employment-related skills, and afterschool programs. Also multiple obstacles facing Neighborhood Networks centers, including overcoming funding and staffing challenges and increasing resident involvement, were included. In addition, the survey helped to identify areas of success that can be used as models for other centers.

By helping to identify successful programs and specific areas for improvement, the survey results provide a baseline for study and a foundation for the coordination of resources and technical assistance in years to come.

### **Work Smart. Use START.**

In case you have not already heard, the newest online tool—START—assists centers with business plan development. START has undergone major enhancements since the first version was released in 2001, and it now takes the business planning process to the next level. START helps centers define their mission online and refine their operating and planning activities.

HUD launched the next generation of START during an August 2003 conference call, and the revamped tool is available through the Neighborhood Networks Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org). Less than 2 months after the START launch, 43 Neighborhood Networks centers had already begun using the tool.

With START, you can:

- ◆ Develop a budget.
- ◆ Plan operations.
- ◆ Track and evaluate programs and performance.

A new workbook and users' guide that leads START users through the business plan completion process was mailed to Neighborhood Networks centers in September 2003. Centers can also call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center (toll free) at (888) 312-2743 for START technical assistance. Local HUD coordinators can also help guide you through the phases of the business planning process. So, I'm asking all center staff to use the new START. It has many new enhancements and advantages for Neighborhood Networks centers.

### **Connecting Stakeholders Nationwide**

Another valuable, new resource is the *2003 Neighborhood Networks Directory*. It is an excellent reference tool for Neighborhood Networks centers seeking to network with other centers and col-

leagues. The publication, which will be mailed to all Neighborhood Networks centers, lists all registered centers alphabetically by state. The publication includes expanded information about centers that participated in the 2003 survey. The directory highlights what the 330 responding centers are doing in their community, what equipment they have, and what programs they offer residents.

The directory also lists centers alphabetically by name and chronologically by starting date, beginning in 1995 when the community-based initiative began. In addition, the directory includes a list of operating consortia and HUD staff, including local HUD coordinators. It is truly a one-stop contact resource or *Who's Who* for Neighborhood Networks stakeholders.

Do not miss another important center survey to come in 2004. After learning how valuable the first survey was, we hope you will plan to participate.

The Neighborhood Networks directory, the enhanced START, and the electronic version of *NNewsline* are just a few of the many new resources and tools that HUD will offer to Neighborhood Networks centers in 2004 and beyond.

## Onsite and Remote Technical Assistance Expands

In 2004, we will provide onsite technical assistance to an additional 20 Neighborhood Networks centers across the country and will follow up with the 30 Neighborhood Networks centers that received technical assistance during the previous year. We also plan to provide remote technical assistance to 150 Neighborhood Networks centers, concentrating on key areas such as employment and job training, partnership development, microenterprise, and health resources. The remote technical assistance will focus on creating and implementing an action plan for growth and sustainability.

## Popular RTAWs Return

Back by popular demand, HUD will again sponsor RTAWs in spring 2004. The informative sessions will focus on key Neighborhood Networks topics, including:

- ◆ Funding resources.
- ◆ Federal government computer technology center initiatives.
- ◆ Grant writing, marketing, developing partnerships, and much more.

HUD will also continue to sponsor conference calls and provide centers with weekly funding updates, online newsletters, technical assistance guides, and fact sheets.

## Gearing Up for the 10th Anniversary Conference

And finally, turning the clock ahead, our 10th Anniversary Neighborhood Networks Conference is scheduled for June 2005. It is going to be a great national conference, and we will have much to celebrate and share. Stay tuned for more details.

I look forward to a successful year of activities as we work together to deliver technology access to America's communities. ♦

### NNewsline

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